

## **BASICS**

### **Overview**

- \$ Hospital security issues include building security, computer security, medical drug security, monetary security, and staff security.
- \$ Staff security can be divided into external staff security (the parking lot) and internal staff security (inside the hospital).
- \$ Mobile clinics have unusual security issues.

### **Terms Defined**

- \$ Backup. The process of copying information from a computer's hard drive to another device. Can be internal or external and partial or full.
- \$ Computer networks. Networks link different computers together, allowing them to communicate. They can be wired or wireless. The largest network is the internet.
- \$ Firewall. A device that limits traffic on a network and controls everything that goes in or out of a computer. This device will reject non-valid programs; however, the firewall does need to be taught what types of programs the user wants to accept, or else it will reject everything.
- \$ Hackers. An individual, or group of individuals, who attempt to break into programs or networks that are restricted. Once in a restricted program, the hacker can cause damage to the program or network. This damage takes many forms, ranging from simply changing minor information to installing viruses, worms, or other dangerous software that will travel between computers and cause damages and erasures.
- \$ Virus. A program or piece of code that is loaded onto a computer without the user's knowledge and runs against his or her wishes. Viruses can, and usually do, replicate themselves; often, they will be programmed to send themselves to other sites. To do so, they require information from the host computer.
- \$ Worm. A program that replicates itself over a computer network and usually performs malicious actions, such as using up a computer's resources or shutting the system down. Worms carry replication information with them: unlike viruses, they do not need data from the host computer.

## **OPTIONS AND ISSUES**

### **Building Security**

- \$ When veterinarians look at a hospital design, their major concerns are the size of the building, traffic flow, storage space, and so on. Security issues are rarely addressed until after the building is completed. As with anything, it is smarter, simpler, and cheaper to

- think about security issues before building or renovating.
- \$ All windows and doors need to be able to be closed and be securely locked.
  - \$ While large, sunny windows make for a brighter and more pleasant workspace, they also significantly increase the risk of break-ins. In questionable areas, facilities protect themselves by blocking up windows or using glass blocks that don't allow any egress. Security bars, that prevent entrance despite broken glass, may also be used.
  - \$ Doors should have a safe lock, and in some areas a deadlock. Talk with local police or a security company for recommendations.
  - \$ All facilities should have an alarm system. They are no longer expensive and can be as complex as is deemed necessary. They use a combination of window and door sensors and motion detectors throughout the facility. Most such systems include the possibility of a direct connection with an alarm monitoring company.
  - \$ The main entrance/exit door should have a code or password, which can be individualized for different staff members. Then, if an employee is laid-off or fired, that code or password can be canceled.
  - \$ There should be set protocol for opening and closing a facility. If there is only one person in the morning, it is the employer's responsibility to install extra protective measures, such as a panic button near the door or a special alarm code that alerts police to a problem without setting off the external alarm.
  - \$ All alarm systems will require staff training: as most systems are simple, it shouldn't take long for everyone to grasp the basics. Larger facilities may want to teach only certain staff members, such as the administrative staff, how to use the more complex and important features of the system.
  - \$ Most alarm systems offer a "panic button," which is connected to the local police station. It is a good idea to install such a button at the front desk, so it can be used in the event of a robbery or assault, and to have another in the back, where it might be reached by someone in trouble.
  - \$ It is often helpful to have a buzzer to unlock the front door. This is becoming more and more popular in cities and emergency clinics.
  - \$ Video surveillance is another possible precaution. These systems can be on a time delay recorder, and can record everyone who enters the facility or moves about the parking lot.
  - \$ Some interior lights should remain on each evening, as this discourages thieves.
  - \$ The parking lot should be well-lighted at night.

### **Computer Security**

- \$ Most veterinary facilities rely on one or more staff members or staff spouses for computer advice: only rarely does a practice have an on-call computer specialist or consultant.
- \$ Having a competent computer specialist, however, is one of the best investments that a business can make.
- \$ In a facility that relies only slightly on computers, they still hold the practice's most valuable information.

- \$ To ensure the safety of this data, practice owners should safeguard their computers against outside threats, such as hackers, and inside threats, such as an angered or fired employee.
- \$ A paid computer consultant can set up computer security systems, and he or she will provide invaluable advice on decisions regarding firewalls, different access levels, passwords, and planning an adequate backup system.

### **Medical Drug Security**

- \$ The presence of controlled substances in any veterinary facility will increase the chances of robbery. While some areas are more likely targets than others, break-ins are possible no matter where a hospital is located.
- \$ Make sure that controlled substances are under extra protection: I recommend a double-lock safe in a locked room. Keys can be given to trusted employees.
- \$ When used, all controlled substances must be logged in a control drug log. All staff members should have training in how to do this, and most facilities appoint two or three staff members to be responsible for keeping the log. This makes it easier to review the log if there is a discrepancy.

### **Monetary Security**

- \$ There are many monetary security issues, ranging from the mundane to the dramatic: staff stealing to robbery.
- \$ Staff embezzlement is a difficult subject to consider, let alone discuss, as practice owners need to implicitly trust their employees. Sadly, however, such crimes happen on a regular basis, so it is important to have habitual checks on daily deposits. Change routines often to make stealing more difficult.
- \$ All facilities should have a petty cash drawer and a drawer for daily cash taken in. Both drawers should be zeroed first thing in the morning and at the end of the night.
- \$ Video surveillance cameras on these drawers will provide a visual record if there is a problem.
- \$ Check with the company who sold/leased the credit card machine to see what is and isn't covered in case of credit card theft.
- \$ The petty cash and money drawers should be kept in an internal safe at night.

### **Staff Security**

- \$ It is important that staff members feel safe in and outside of their workplace.
- \$ Staff should know that giving bad news to a client could put them in danger, as sometimes the healthcare provider is confused with the problem, and the client may react violently.
- \$ Schedule staff training on how to handle difficult situations, including irate clients, clients in altered states, aggression management, and workplace violence prevention. In

- extremely dangerous areas, a facility might also offer self-defense education or have personal protective equipment available.
- \$ The facility should have a zero-tolerance employee violence program, which should be written up in the hospital manual and explained in detail to all staff members. Violence, or the threat of violence, cannot be tolerated.
  - \$ Conduct serious background checks on all employees: talk with his or her previous employer and find out if he or she has any previous history of violence or co-worker problems.
  - \$ The entire staff should be trained on how to react in the case of a robbery. Rules and protocols will minimize danger, which needs to be discussed and emphasized.
  - \$ The threat of robbery or assault can be minimized by always having at least two people in the hospital.
  - \$ When leaving the facility, a buddy system works well.
  - \$ When a staff member must work alone, make sure that he or she understands set safety protocols.
  - \$ Do not have the answering service put emergency phone calls directly through; instead, have the service take the client's phone number, and call them back personally.
  - \$ If going in for an emergency alone, be sure you know the client well. It is a good idea to have someone call you at the hospital to make sure that you are alright.
  - \$ In the case of emergency evacuations for fire or natural disasters, staff needs to know that their safety is of the utmost importance. All facilities should have an emergency plan, and all staff should know where a hard copy is and how to react appropriately.
  - \$ Issues of safety regarding sharps, radiation, animal handling, noise, chemicals, compressed gas, and other types of inner-facility hazards should be outlined in an easily accessible hospital safety manual.

### **Mobile Practices**

- \$ Not only do mobile practices have to deal with all of the above issues, they have a whole host of others.
- \$ The chance of robbery and assault increases dramatically for a mobile practice, so it is even more important to have protocols in place for the protection of employees.
- \$ If the veterinarian is working alone, he or she should be sure to contact someone before entering an isolated area.
- \$ Large amounts of cash should not be carried from one call to the next.
- \$ A pre-programmed cell phone to the police or an alarm company should always be carried.
- \$ Personal protection may be necessary.

### **Recommended Reading**

- \$ Association of Veterinary Practice Management Consultants and Advisors Homepage. 2004. Available at [www.avpmca.org](http://www.avpmca.org). Accessed July 12, 2004.

§ PSD Office in a Box Homepage. 1997. Available at [www.psdoffice.com](http://www.psdoffice.com). Accessed July 12, 2004. A filing system that helps prevent embezzlement.

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